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AN ESSAY  
ON THE  
SPIRIT AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF  
HEBREW POETRY,

BY  
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3.10.29



## A SHORT ESSAY

ON THE SPIRIT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF HEBREW POETRY.

Many circumstances contributed to make the ancient Hebrews a highly poetic people. The nomadic and peaceful life of the Patriarchs; the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, and their wonderful deliverance and exodus from that land; their wanderings through the wilderness; their taking possession of a land that was said to flow with milk and honey; their natural taste for music, which was afterwards carefully fostered in the Temple service; the beautiful and romantic scenery of the holy land; their magnificent Temple and its imposing service: these and many other circumstances in the chequered history of the Israelites, furnished inexhaustible sources from which the most sublime poetic images might be drawn, and which the Hebrew poets were never weary of turning to account. Hence, "the Bible," as a writer has justly observed, "is a mass of beautiful figures; its words and its thoughts are alike poetical; it has gathered around its central truths all natural beauty and interest; it is a temple with one altar and one God, but illuminated by a thousand varied lights, and studded with a thousand ornaments." The inherent love of the ancient Hebrews for poetry is strikingly apparent, even from the limited amount of literature that has escaped the ravages of time. Their language, as soon as it passes the limits of mere narration, at once becomes dignified: their blessings; their prayers and supplications; their exhortations and denunciations; their charges and admonitions; their dire lamentations and triumphant bursts of joy; all display strikingly their natural taste for poetry: and hence it is that so much of the Hebrew Scriptures is written in poetry, and that even among the prose writings we so frequently meet with poetic effusions. So early as in Genesis iv. 23, 24, we have an example of a desultory piece of poetry abruptly introduced, in the address of Lamech to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,  
Wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech!  
If I have slain a man to my wounding,  
And a young man to my hurt:  
If Cain shall be avenged seven times,  
Then Lamech seventy times seven."\*

This address is in hemistichs, according to the genius of Hebrew poetry. It was, no doubt, handed down by tradition to the time

\* Commentators have been not a little puzzled in endeavouring to discover the cause that gave rise to this address, so abruptly introduced. From the absence of any further information than simply what may be gathered from the speech itself,

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of Moses, and is not only the most ancient piece of poetry in the Old Testament, but also the only relic of antediluvian poetry extant.

The celebrated blessing and prophecy of Jacob, as recorded in Gen. xlix. 3-27 inclusive, is also couched in highly poetic language. The striking difference in style that pervades that portion of the chapter from the rest, must be apparent to the English reader. The chapter commences with plain prose composition:—

“And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, gather yourselves together, and I will declare to you *that* which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father.”

But at the next verse begins the prophesy, and with it a totally different style of composition; the language becomes dignified and figurative, and assumes all the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. We shall subjoin the next four verses, that the reader may see the difference of style from those just quoted:—

“Reuben, my first born *art* thou,  
My might, and the beginning of my strength,  
The excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.  
A boiling up as of water *art thou*, thou shalt not excel,  
For thou ascendedst the bed of thy father,  
Then didst thou defile it:—  
My couch he ascended!  
Simeon and Levi are brethren;  
Instruments of violence are their covenants.  
My soul, enter not into their deliberations,  
My honour, be not joined in their assembly,  
For in their anger they slew a man,  
And in their wantonness they maimed an ox.”

Besides these there are many other poetical compositions dispersed throughout the prose books of the Old Testament. As for instance: the song by the well, Num. xxi. 17, 18; the prophecies of Balaam, Num. xxiii. and xxiv; the triumphal song of Deborah, Judges v.; the parable of Jotham, Judges ix. 7-15; the riddle of Samson, and the solution of it by the Philistines, Judges xiv. 14, 18; the exulting chant of Hannah, 1 Samuel ii. 1-10; the

all that can be advanced on the subject must necessarily be mere conjecture. Still, from the strain of the address it is evident that Lamech contrasts some minor offence of his own with the hideous crime of fratricide of Cain. It is, therefore, not improbable that Lamech had slain some one in self-defence, and that this address was intended to console his wives, who, perhaps, felt alarmed lest the friends of the deceased might seek an opportunity to avenge his death. To allay their fear, Lamech contrasts his offence with that of Cain; as much as to say, surely if Cain, who had slain his brother without the least provocation, shall be avenged seven-fold should any one seek his life, then Lamech who had merely killed a man in self-defence, shall certainly be avenged seventy and seven fold; that is, incomparably greater will his punishment be, who should slay Lamech, who has only acted in his own defence. The expressions “a man” and a “young man” do not imply that Lamech had slain two persons, as it is quite in accordance, as will be hereafter shewn, with the genius of Hebrew poetry, to repeat the same idea in different terms.



sublime elegy of David on the death of his friend Jonathan, II. Samuel i. 19-27, &c.

Of the poetical books of the Old Testament, the first that claims our notice is the book of Job, as being, no doubt, *the most ancient writing* that has come down to us. There are indeed some who maintain that the author of this book lived as late as the time of Solomon, or one or two centuries afterwards; whilst others, still more extravagant in their views, place him shortly before or during the Babylonish captivity; these are, however, fortuitous conjectures, which can neither be sustained by proof nor supported by reasonable arguments, whilst many circumstances, gathered from the book itself, plainly tend to show that the author of the book must have lived, if not in the patriarchal age, at least before the exode of the Israelites from Egypt; but as this subject will be fully discussed hereafter in the commentary on that book, it is unnecessary to dwell upon it here.

In the book of Job we possess a monument of genius, which, simply regarded as a literary production, is without doubt one of the most characteristic and sublime that has come down to us from the ancient world. The poetical merit of this book is very great; we may say, unrivalled. Its style is pure, its images are sublime, its ideas lofty, and the language and arguments at once powerful and impressive. The poesy of the book of Job is the pure poesy of nature; the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, the heavens, the seas and their contents, all contribute richly to embellish the conceptions of the author. Job had evidently made the material universe his study, but as he rambled through its vast domain in search of knowledge, wherewith to store his inquiring mind, he beheld likewise everywhere the handy work of the Most High; and thus as he drank deeper and deeper of its intellectual draughts, he became at the same time more and more firmly impressed with the all-pervading power, greatness and love of its Lord and Creator. The study of nature had made him better acquainted with the merciful dealings of the GOD of nature, and hence his firm belief in the overruling power of the Almighty. In everything he perceives the hand of God, and though it be far beyond his comprehension, he still maintains that it is so ordered for some wise purpose. This doctrine he establishes by such arguments as the following:—

“Secure are the tents of the robbers,  
And those provoking God *live* in tranquillity;  
Into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.”

Job xii. 6.

“Why do the wicked live ;  
 They grow old, and even increase in wealth.  
 Their seed is established in their sight, about them ;  
 And their offspring before their eyes.  
 Their houses are secure from fear,  
 And the rod of God is not upon them.  
 His ox engendereth, and faileth not ;  
 His cow calveth, and doth not miscarry ?”

Job xxi. 7-10.

As much as to say : ‘This indeed may appear marvellous to us, yet so it is. The wicked live, they grow old, and even become rich. Their children are established around them; their dwellings are secure; no chastisements of God apparently come upon them, though they have merited them; their cattle increase; in short, everything seems to prosper with them. Here, then, is prosperity, where we should expect poverty; here is what may tend to make life happy, where we should look for affliction and misery. Such are the inscrutable ways of God, such are his inscrutable dealings with man ! Truly they are past finding out !’

Upon this doctrine of overruling providence, Job takes his stand against his friends, who consider his calamities and sufferings as the consequence of some sin which he had committed. Job, on the contrary, maintains that, as the wicked do often prosper, so the most upright may frequently be very unfortunate. God acts according to his sovereign pleasure. His omnipotence is indeed apparent in every part of the creation; but his justice in the government of the world cannot always be comprehended; of this we have examples in the prosperity of the wicked, and the sufferings and afflictions to which the righteous are frequently subjected. It must not, however, be inferred from Job’s contending that the calamities which had befallen him were no evidence of his guilt, that he entertained the idea that man may be altogether free from sin. No, he entirely repudiates such a notion :—

“Truly I know it is so,  
 And how shall man be just with God ?”

Job ix. 2.

‘It is as you have stated regarding the sinful nature of man. I fully acknowledge that it admits of no doubt, for no man can be just in the sight of God.’ And again, at verse 20, he says :—

“If I am right, my mouth condemns me ;  
 Am I perfect, and it will declare me guilty.”

As much as to say : ‘Although I may appear just in my own eyes, and do not feel conscious of any guilt, still my own mouth must acknowledge that I am a sinner. But whilst I fully admit that no man is free from sin, yet this by no means argues that the calamities which have befallen me are chastisements for sin.’

“One *thing* it is, therefore I say it,  
Perfect or unjust, he destroyed.”

Ver. 22.

—that is, ‘One thing is certain, and therefore I say it freely, upright or wicked, all are liable to affliction, and consequently my sufferings are no proof of sin.’

Job had no doubt instituted a rigid self-examination; and although he may have seen many shortcomings in his past actions, yet he could not discover any *sin* of such a nature as to lead to such chastisements. His children, too, had evidently been brought up in the fear of God: this is apparent from the anxiety which he evinced in his rising up early in the morning, to offer burnt offerings as an atonement for the sins which his sons might have committed in an unguarded moment during their festivities. The sudden bereavement of possessions and children, and the infliction of such intense bodily suffering, must necessarily have been a perfect riddle to Job; and, feeling conscious that these calamities were not the consequences of sin which either he or his sons had committed, he looked upon them with an eye of faith, as instances of those dealings of God with man, which no human wisdom is able to fathom.

But although Job’s sufferings and calamities were to him involved in such perfect mystery, that mystery is entirely solved in the two first chapters of the book, in which we have a full account of all that transpired with regard to Job’s trial. The occurrences upon earth and the transactions in heaven, are alike brought before us in the most vivid and distinct manner, intended to bring to our view subjects worthy of the deepest meditation, and to convey lessons of momentous import.

The book begins with a brief history of Job before his trial: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.” This verse, then, forms the grand theme of the whole book. The piety of Job gave rise to his trial, and his trial gave rise afterwards to the discussion between him and his three friends. But in order to give a full idea of the extent of Job’s trial, the account goes on to say, that he had been blessed with seven sons and three daughters; that his substance was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household, so that he was the greatest of all the men of the East. Here the account might have finished; everything necessary to the comprehension of the magnitude of the trial is contained in the preceding statement. But the sacred writer tells us further, that Job’s sons went and made a feast,



which they celebrated at one another's houses in turn, and which consequently lasted seven days; and that they also invited their sisters to eat and to drink with them. And further, that as soon as the days of their feasting had expired, Job always sent for them, and sanctified them, and offered burnt offerings according to their number, saying, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This allusion to the customary yearly celebration of a feast by Job's sons is evidently introduced in the first place to shew that not only did Job lead a pious life, but that it likewise was his anxious desire to keep his whole family from the pollution of sin; secondly, to shew the kindly and harmonious feeling that pervaded his household; and, thirdly, to indicate by their feasting together how Job was at once bereaved of all his children.

The inspired writer having informed us of the great piety and prosperous condition of Job, next proceeds to tell us what took place concerning him in heaven. On a certain day, when the holy angels came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan, the great enemy of mankind, came also among them. And the Lord asked him, "Whence comest thou?" The reply being, "From going to and fro in the earth," the Lord enquired of him whether he had considered that truly pious and just man Job, whose equal was not upon earth. Whereupon the subtle spirit replied: "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not blessed him on every side? But put now forth thine hand upon all that he hath: deprive him of his possessions, and see whether he will still persevere in his piety." And the Lord said unto Satan: "Behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand." So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.\* From this narrative we learn, then, that Job's calamities were inflicted as a trial, to prove whether his piety would cease with his prosperity; whether, when plunged from the highest pinnacle of happiness into the deepest miseries conceivable, he would still continue steadfast in the fear of God. The sequel of the narrative tells us how the good patriarch conducted himself under his heavy afflictions. So rapidly, we are told, did one misfortune succeed upon the other, that before one messenger had finished his tale of havoc, another came with still

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\* The scene in heaven has been imitated by Bayley, in his "Festus," and by Goethe in the "Prologue to Faust." It is much to be regretted that a subject like this, where the Deity takes such a prominent part, should have ever been made subservient to the secular drama; but it becomes still more reprehensible when the author so far forgets himself as to employ language irreverent and disrespectful to the Deity, such as Goethe puts in the mouth of his ideal demon. Its wit may indeed please some, but its coarseness cannot fail to disgust.



more appalling tidings; so that Job found himself, in but a few hours, flockless, childless, bereaved of servants—a prince converted to a beggar. But Job's piety was too firmly implanted to be shaken. Like a tree firmly rooted, which bids defiance to the raging tempest, stood the patient patriarch, unmoved by the tempests of affliction which Satan in rapid succession hurled upon him. He did not tear his gray hair in agony, nor did he break forth into a wild frenzy of grief; but, after the custom of his country, in a seemly manner, he rent his mantle\* and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshipped, saying: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The great firmness which Job displayed in this severe trial becomes even more strikingly apparent, when we consider the plan which Satan adopted in inflicting the calamities. He arranged everything in such a manner as to make Job feel them most severely, and if possible to make them effective to shake his faith. In the first place it will be seen, in enumerating Job's possessions, the sacred writer begins with his children, as the best and dearest of them all; then he mentions the sheep and camels, as forming the next most important part of his wealth; and lastly, the oxen and she asses. In the infliction of the calamities, however, we find the order reversed. First comes the messenger with tidings of the loss of the oxen and asses, the least valuable of his possessions; next he receives the news of the entire loss of the sheep, and after that, of the loss of the camels; and lastly, when Job was already enough afflicted, then comes the painful intelligence of the death of all his children. Satan, too, lets the first and third misfortunes be effected by human agents—namely, the Sabeans and Chaldeans; but the second and fourth by supernatural agencies—namely, lightning and storm. This circumstance must have greatly increased the grief of Job, as that which was most dear to him was taken from him, as he would naturally think, by God. All was therefore arranged so as to make Job feel the affliction most severely, and if possible to shake him in his faith.

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\* The practice of rending the clothes as a sign of mourning and expression of grief, or of horror, is very ancient. Thus Reuben rent his clothes when he came to the pit and found that Joseph was no more there. Jacob rent his clothes when he recognized the coat of his son, thinking a wild beast had torn him. Joseph's brothers rent their clothes when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack; and this custom is often alluded to throughout the Bible, down to the last age of the Jewish empire. In the Acts, xiv. 14, we read that Barnabas and Paul rent their clothes when they heard that the priest of Jupiter and the people at Lystra were about to offer sacrifices to them. It is still practised by the modern Jews at the death of the following relatives—namely, father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, and wife. They make a cut with a knife in the coat, on the right side, then rend it about a hand's breadth; but for father or mother both coat and waistcoat are thus torn, and on the left side.

But the cup of Job's sorrow was not yet full; there were still other griefs in store for him. Satan had indeed put his piety to the severest test, without in the least making him swerve from his faith; but he was not contented with this trial, for it is not in his nature to desist so long as there remains a spark of hope of entrapping his victim. Hence we are told, when the sons of God came again to present themselves before the Lord, that Satan came also among them; and that when God asked him whether he had considered his servant Job, remaining still perfect and upright, notwithstanding his severe trials, Satan answered: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the Lord said unto Satan: "Behold he is in thy hand, but save his life." Satan having obtained this permission (for without it he could not have touched a hair of Job's head), went forth accordingly, and smote Job with sore boils even from the sole of his foot unto his crown. But the tempter was also foiled in this attempt. Job remained as firm in his faith as before; and when his wife came, not indeed to console him in his distress, nor speak words of comfort to him, as she ought to have done, but rather to upbraid him for still retaining his integrity, he calmly exclaimed: "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Could Job but have heard the song of triumph that must have burst from the angelic host, when he uttered these memorable words, it would have been consolation to his bleeding heart, and soothing balm to his distressing sores.

This expression of humble submission to the will of God closes the trial of Job; the good fight is fought, and Satan proved a liar. But there is another struggle for him at hand. When Job's three friends heard of the evil that had befallen him, they came to mourn with him and to comfort him; and they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. Had the friends of Job strictly adhered to this laudable intention, their words of comfort could not have failed to cheer the much-afflicted patriarch; for what can be more animating, what more consoling, than a few kind words from a sincere friend in the time of trouble and affliction? But as it was, instead of imparting comfort, they only aggravated his grief; instead of binding up his bleeding heart, they wounded it still more, by their charging him with being either a grievous sinner or a great hypocrite.

Job being at last overcome by pain and grief, endeavours to seek relief by giving vent to his long suppressed feelings. The thought that if he had never been born, or had died at the time of his birth, so that he now would be at rest and free from suffering and sorrow, wrung from him that bitter curse contained in ch. iii., which is unquestionably the most piercing cry of woe and lamentation ever uttered in this world.\*

This outburst of intense grief, lays the foundation for the arguments between Job and his three friends. The profound silence that had hitherto reigned in the place of mourning being now broken by Job himself, his having given utterance to language which, in the opinion of his friends, was highly reprehensible, induced Eliphaz, as being probably the oldest of the three, to begin to remonstrate with Job on the injustice of his complaint, and in this he was afterwards followed by Bildad and Zophar; Job replying to each of them in turn. The principal points which form the subject of discussion, from ch. iv. to ch. xxxi. inclusive, may be briefly summed up as follows: his friends urge against him:

1st—That, as no man is free from sin, therefore all men are liable to misfortunes.

2nd—That misfortunes and afflictions must in all cases be regarded as visitations for some sin committed, as it is inconsistent with infinite justice to afflict without cause, or to punish without guilt; and therefore, that Job's maintaining that he suffered innocently was the height of folly, and his repining at the chastisement of God was only adding fresh sin to his former transgressions.

3rd—That although a man may for a time be chastised for sin, yet he may be restored again to his former prosperity, and even be blessed with more success, if he sincerely repent of his sins, and firmly resolve to lead a better life.

4th—That although the wicked may for a time be seemingly prosperous, yet his prosperity is never of long duration, for the judgments of God will surely overtake him sooner or later.

Job, on the other hand, maintains against his friends:

1st—That the just and upright man may at times be destined to suffer the severest calamities, while the wicked is frequently very prosperous; that it is beyond the range of human understanding

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\* Swift made it a practice each birthday to retire into his closet in order to read the third chapter of Job.



always to fathom God's dealings with man; that it is consequently exceedingly cruel and unjust, as well as uncharitable, to charge a man with sin because he is unfortunate or suffering under severe affliction; and that such conduct is well deserving the severest punishment of the Almighty.

2nd—That there are cases in which the sufferer has a right to justify himself before God, and even to repine at His decrees under deep affliction. This supposed right Job strenuously maintains against his friends regarding his case to be one of those in which such a liberty is questionable.

The discussion is kept up by the contending parties with great skill, and the most eloquent diction; the language becoming gradually more passionate, until at last Job silences his friends, and remains the victor. But although Job had very properly defended the principle, that the righteous may sometimes be subjected to heavy trials, and therefore, to infer from a man's misfortunes that he must be a sinner, is both unreasonable and unjust: yet as in the course of the discussion, he had made some very extravagant and unwarrantable assertions, persisting in the opinion that in many cases the sufferer might justify himself before God, and repine at His decrees, he could not be allowed to keep possession of the field. Another interlocutor consequently steps forward to reason with Job. A young man named Elihu, who had been present and heard the arguments of both parties, but according to the strict rules of etiquette, had refrained from speaking, or as the Hebrew would say, laid his hand upon his mouth until those more advanced in age had finished; when he perceived that the three friends had nothing more to reply, and that the discussion was apparently at an end, ventured likewise to express his opinion. He begins by expressing his great disappointment at the three friends not being able to convince Job of his error; and then addressing himself directly to Job, he endeavours to impress upon him by the most forcible arguments drawn from God's unlimited sovereignty and unsearchable wisdom, that it was not inconsistent with Divine justice to afflict even the most righteous, and therefore all calamities should be borne without murmur, it being ever our duty humbly to submit to the Divine dispensations. He reproves Job for boasting of his integrity, and for charging God with injustice, and urges upon him that it is for man, who is a sinful

creature, to humble himself before God, whose ways are just and whose judgments are upright.

Yea, surely God will not do wickedly,  
And the Almighty will not pervert judgment.

Ch. xxxiv. 12.

The speech of Elihu, which begins at ch. xxxii. and ends with ch. xxxvii., is at once powerful, impressive and sublime, and had no doubt the effect of carrying conviction to the mind of Job, who had listened to the rebukes and admonitions of Elihu without offering a word in reply, although he had challenged him to do so.

If there are (i.e., if thou hast) words, answer me:  
Speak, for I desire to justify thee (i.e., thy justification).

Ch. xxxiii. 32.

But although Elihu had silenced Job, yet he had by no means given a satisfactory solution of the question at issue. He likewise maintains, with the three friends, that no one suffers innocently, but in all cases calamities are to be regarded as punishments for sins committed, and as they are intended as corrections, they may consequently be inflicted even on the most upright man. We learn, however, from the two first chapters that Job's calamities did not befall him on account of sin, but were inflicted as a trial to prove his steadfastness in the fear of God; and we also learn further, that God justified Job in maintaining his innocence against his three friends, whilst His wrath was kindled against them, for not having spoken of Him the thing that is right, as Job had done. God indeed blames Job for not perceiving the Divine justice in everything, and for repining at His decree, instead of yielding unrestricted submission to His will; but not for vindicating his integrity against his friends. The chief point of discussion would therefore have remained undecided at the close of Elihu's speech, and as Job did not reply to him, it would have left the false impression that he was really afflicted for some sin which he must have committed, but for the final interposition of God himself. Accordingly, as soon as Elihu finished speaking, a violent thunderstorm arose, out of which the Lord addressed Job, showering down upon him question after question in rapid succession, illustrative of His omnipotence in the formation and disposition of the works of creation, and showing how foolishly the latter had acted in presuming to reason with God, when His mighty works prove His infinite Majesty, and consequently His absolute justice.

Such questions on topics so profound, so mysterious, could not fail to show clearly the shallowness of human knowledge, and to convince Job of his utter incapability of understanding the ways and designs of the omnipotent JEHOVAH. Accordingly, even before the series of questions had come to a close, he exclaims in deep humility,

Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee ?  
 My hand I lay upon my mouth.  
 Once have I spoken, but I will no more reply,  
 Yea twice, but I will do it no more.

Ch. xl. 4. & 5.

Job having acknowledged and sincerely repented of his offence, God now addressed the three friends, and declared to them His displeasure because they had not spoken of Him "the thing that was right as His servant Job hath done," and commanded that they should bring an offering as an atonement for their guilt, and that Job should pray for them, whose prayer He would accept. These commands being performed, God made an end of Job's suffering, and granted him renewed prosperity, blessing his latter days even more than those before his trial.

From this brief analysis of the book of Job, it will be observed, that whilst it conveys many wholesome lessons, its chief design is to set forth one grand and momentous truth, viz: *that the affliction of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked are perfectly consistent with Divine justice; that calamity, as the veiled grace of God, is never alone with the upright, but that manifest proofs of God's favour always accompany or follow it.*

The book of Job will therefore ever be to the pious an inexhaustible source from whence he may draw consolations in the time of calamity. If sorrow for a time cast its dismal shades over a once happy home, the book of Job is well calculated to dispel the gloom, and cheer the drooping spirit. If calamity rack the mind and threaten to drive to despair, the book of Job affords solace to the distressed, and directs him to look up to Him who will never forsake those of a contrite heart. If sickness prostrate the frail body, and make it groan under excruciating pain, the book of Job teaches that under such a visitation may be veiled the Divine grace, and encourages to submit humbly and patiently to the will of a merciful and just God.

But it may be said; although the book of Job satisfactorily solves the question, so far as the righteous is concerned, it affords



no clear solution as regards the prosperity of the wicked. This, no doubt, is quite correct, but it must be remembered that the main point of discussion must necessarily be the calamities of the righteous, as arising from the innocent suffering of Job; the prosperity of the wicked is merely incidentally introduced, and forms no direct part of the plan of book. Indeed the problem, why the wicked often prosper must ever remain a mystery; we know it often is so, but why, we cannot tell; human knowledge and human wisdom cannot fathom it. Still, as the book of Job distinctly sets forth that infinite wisdom and justice pervade all the works of the Almighty, it follows that if the wicked be sometimes permitted to prosper, it must be for some wise and just purpose. This is all that comes within the scope of the book, and is all that is necessary for us to know.

In the book of Job we find, however, many forcible allusions to the transient felicity of the wicked. As for instance ch. v. 3 & 4.

“I have seen” says Eliphaz, “a foolish man (i.e., a wicked man) taking root;  
But suddenly I cursed his habitation.  
His children are far from help:  
They are crushed in the gate, and there is no deliverer.”

Eliphaz shows here in the example of a sinner, that although he was prosperous, and thus firmly established, yet quickly matters changed, so that whilst he at first would have pronounced his habitation happy on account of such prosperity, and blessed him, regarding him as a pious man, he soon saw reason to curse the place as being that of a curse-laden sinner; for suddenly his well-merited misfortunes and troubles came upon him. And so great were the misfortunes that befel that impious man, than even his children after him suffered from it. His children were oppressed in the gate, (which was a common place of assembly for the inhabitants of a city, and also the place where justice was administered), and there was no one to take their part. The book of Job is therefore well calculated to teach the wicked, who may be revelling in luxury, that his prosperity is no indication of God's favour, but that on the contrary, His righteous judgments may even overtake him in this world; so that, where all is happiness to-day, there may be nothing but misery to-morrow.

The book of Job is a composition which is universally admired for the loftiness of its style, the magnificence of its descriptions, the energy of its expressions, the sublimity of its thoughts and the

grandeur of its imagery. It presents everything lifelike to our view; and Gilfillan has justly remarked, that "If any word can express the merit of the natural descriptions in Job, it is the word *gusto*. You do something more than see his behemoth, his war-horse, and his leviathan. You touch, smell, hear, and handle them too. It is no shadow of the object he sets before you, but the object itself, in its length, breadth, height and thickness."

Moses, the great lawgiver, has given to the poetry of his nation another turn. True, we still behold in him the poetic genius leaning upon the shepherd's staff, but then his poetical writings are embellished with rich embroidery which the Bedouin despises. His poetic pictures are chiefly drawn from the motley history of his nation, which he has painted with a masterly hand, in the most vivid colours. He is happy in prose as well as in poetry, his style, though easy, is notwithstanding spirited, and his admonitions to the rebellious Israelites are at once grand and impressive. Professor Wahl, formerly of the University of Leipzig, in speaking of the poetry of Moses, has so beautifully described its merit, that I cannot forbear quoting it, although it will lose much of its force and beauty in translation. He says: "Seine Poesie ist lebendig, wachsend, und umfassend, Moses Genius ist nicht matt; sein Flügelschlag, indem er daherschwebt, tönt reine Sphärenharmonie, bricht den Æther, und trifft die gerade Bahn zur Sonne—i.e. His poetry is animated, attractive, and comprehensive; the genius of Moses is not feeble; the stroke of his pinions as he soars aloft sends forth the pure harmony of the spheres, cleaves the æther and pursues the direct path to the sun." The song of Moses by the Red Sea\* (Exod. xvi. 19.) is a song of victory, but all such songs of the Hebrews are at the same time songs of praise to Him who is the Disposer of all events. Victory was always looked upon by the pious and faithful of the nation as attained only by the special interposition of the Almighty, and accordingly, the praise of God forms always the most prominent part in their triumphal songs. The song of Moses,

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\*The Red Sea, or Arabian Gulf, is an extensive gulf of the Indian Ocean, dividing Arabia from the opposite coast of Africa. Its length is about 1,400 miles, and its greatest breadth about 200 miles. The English name Red Sea is a translation of the Latin name *rubrum mare*, which is again a translation of the Greek term *ερυθρὰ θάλασσα* (i.e., the Red Sea). There are various opinions advanced regarding the origin of this name. Some think it received it from the coral rocks and reefs with which it abounds; but it is well known that the coral of the red sea is white, and hence this supposition must fall to the ground. Others again would derive its name, either from the reddish colour of the waters, or from the red sand at the

Deut. xxxii. 1, 43, to the assembled Israelities, before his death, is a poem which strikingly displays the poetical powers of its author. The language, whilst it is full of pathos, is at the same time gentle and winning, searching the inmost depths of the soul, and, well calculated to arouse the slumbering feelings to a lively sensibility to the infinite power, majesty, and mercy of the Almighty. His last prophetic blessing of the children of Israel, Deut. xxxiii., and the xc. Psalm, entitled, "a prayer of Moses, the man of God," are other examples of highly poetic and sublime compositions of the great lawgiver and prophet.

To David belongs the honor of having brought the Lyric Poetry of the Hebrews to perfection. He evinced from his youth a passion for music as well as for poetry. His early years were spent as a shepherd in tending his father's flocks in the field, where he gathered the many flowers which so often adorn his writings. His skill on the harp procured him admittance to the presence of the king, a circumstance which must have greatly encouraged him to improve the musical talents with which he was so highly gifted. But, having several times narrowly escaped, with the harp in his hand, the deadly spear which Saul hurled at him through jealousy, he fled into the wilderness of Judea, where he wandered for several years. There in the lonely desert, wandering from place to place, seeking a safe abode, his harp was his comforter and friend. Its melodious tones assuaged his fears, and made him forgetful of envy and hatred. It was not laid aside when brighter days smiled upon him, but it still remained his companion in the royal palace,

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bottom of it; but we are told by many writers that so far from its waters having a red appearance, it is rather of a greenish colour from the great quantity of sea-weeds and moss that grow in it. We may also remark that the waters of almost all shallow seas are apparently of a green colour. It is therefore more likely that it received its name from the land of Edom, as its north-eastern part washes that country. Now the Hebrew word עֲדֹם (ēdōm) signifies red, and was a name given

to Esau on the occasion of his selling his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage, (See Gen. xxv., 30); and from him this name was transferred to the country which his posterity possessed. Hence the name, *sea of Edom*. Prideaux tells us, (see Connection i. 14, 15), that the ancient inhabitants of the neighbouring countries called it (Yam Edom), i.e., the sea of Edom; this name, however, does not occur in Scripture. The Greek having mistaken *Edom* for an appellative instead of a proper name, accordingly called it ἑρυθρὰ θάλασσα i.e., the *Red Sea*. The Hebrew name is יַם סוּף (Yām Sūph), i.e., the *sea of Sedge*, and is so called from the great quantity of sea-weed that grows there. It is stated by several heathen writers that the *Ichthyophagi* (i.e., those Egyptians who lived near the Red Sea, and chiefly maintained themselves by the fish they catch), dwelt in huts made of ribs of fish, and covered with sea-weed.



where he continued to increase the poetry of the Hebrews; dangers, conquests, cares, grief, every pious act that he performed, presented new matter to him; and thus we have in the productions of the king of song, a true mirror of his life and times. Hence, Luther calls the Psalms: "a garden where the most beautiful flowers and fruits flourish, but where, at other times, also the most tempestuous winds rage."

Although most of the Psalms no doubt have been composed upon particular occasions, yet there are some which can neither be ascribed to any particular time, nor regarded as referring to any incident in the history of David. Thus, for instance, Psalm i., is strictly a religious song, divided into two regular strophes of three verses each; the first strophe setting forth the happiness of the pious, and the second the fate of the wicked. Of Psalms of similar import, we have several in the book of Psalms, as for instance, the cxii. and cxxv. Again, we have many hymns of praise and adoration, displaying God's power, majesty, and glory; as Psalms viii. xix. xxix., &c. In Psalm cxxxiii., we have a beautiful ode on unity and brotherly love; and Psalms xxxii., l. and cxix., are purely religious didactic poems. Many of the Psalms possess great sublimity, but softness, tenderness, and pathos are their prevailing characteristics.

Bishop Horn\* has justly remarked that, "The Psalms are an epitome of the Bible, adapted to the purpose of devotion. They treat occasionally of the creation and formation of the world; the dispensations of Providence, and the economy of grace; the transactions of the patriarchs; the Exodus of the children of Israel; their journey through the wilderness, and settlement in Canaan; their law, priesthood, and ritual; the exploits of their great men, wrought through faith; their sins and captivities, their repentances and restorations; the sufferings and victories of David; the peaceful and happy reign of Solomon; the advent of Messiah, with its effects and consequences; His incarnation, birth, life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, kingdom, and priesthood; the effusion of the Spirit; the conversion of the nations; the rejection of the Jews; the establishment, increase, and prosperity of the Christian Church; the end of the wicked, and the final triumph of the righteous with their Lord and King." Well, indeed, might

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\*Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms.

Hooker ask, "What is there necessary for man to know which the Psalms are not able to teach?" And well might Luther say of the Psalms: "Thou readest through them the hearts of all the saints; and hence the Psalter is the manual of all saints; for each finds in it, in whatever circumstances he is placed, psalms and words so well adapted to his condition, and so fully according with the feelings, that they seem to have been thus composed for his own sake, insomuch, that he cannot find, or even wish to find, any words that are better suited to his case."

All the Psalms, with the exception of thirty-four, are furnished with an inscription. Some of these inscriptions set forth the respective authors of the Psalms. Thus seventy-four\* are ascribed to David, twelve to Asaph,† eleven to the sons of Korah, two to Solomon, one to Moses, one to Heman (one of the leaders of the temple music; see 1 Chron. vi. 33,) and one to Ethan (also one of David's singers; see 1 Chron. vi. 44.) Sometimes these inscriptions state the occasion upon which the Psalms were composed. As, for instance, the title of Psalm iii.—"A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son"; or of Psalm vii.—"Shiggaion (*i.e.* an elegy or plaintive song) of David, which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite." Sometimes the inscription indicates the kind of composition to which the Psalm belongs—as מִשְׁכִּיל (măskil) Psalm xxxii. 1—*i.e.*, a song or poem teaching wisdom or piety. תְּפִלָּה (t'phillāh); Psalm lxxxvi. 1—*i.e.* a prayer. Also the kind of instruments with which the Psalm is to be accompanied, as נְגִינֹת (n'gīnoth) Psalm iv. 1—*i.e.*, stringed instruments. נְחִילֹת (n'chilōth), Psalm v., 1—*i.e.*, pipes or flutes, or perhaps wind instruments in general.

Much obscurity prevails as regards the proper import of some of the terms employed in the inscriptions, and this arises no doubt from the imperfect knowledge we possess of the temple music. The translators of our authorised version have therefore acted wisely in retaining for the most part the Hebrew words; it was far better to retain the original term, than to assume a translation based merely upon conjecture.

\* To the above, the Septuagint version adds ten Psalms more, viz., the xxxiii., xliii., xci., xciv. to xcix. and civ.

† Asaph was the son of Barachias of the tribe of Levi, and was appointed by David to preside over the choral services which he instituted. See 1 Chron. xvi., 4, 5.

The term שֶׁלֶחַ (*sēlāh*), which occurs seventy-three times in the Psalms is commonly regarded to denote *rest* or *pause*, and as it stands generally in the middle of a Psalm at the end of a section or strophe, its use appears to have been to direct the singers in chanting the Psalms to *rest* or *pause* whilst the instruments played an interlude or symphony. This supposition is supported by the authority of the Septuagint, where the term שֶׁלֶחַ (*sēlāh*) is rendered by διάψαλμα, i.e. *interlude*, *symphony*.

Solomon seems to have inherited a love of poetry from his father. We are distinctly told, 1 Kings iv. 32, that he had composed three thousand proverbs and and one thousand and five songs;\* of the latter, however, unhappily only two Psalms and the Song of Songs are now extant. In the writings of Solomon we have the precious relics of one who was gifted with “a wise and an understanding heart,” such as has never been possessed by any human being before or since. It would, therefore, be presumption to dilate upon the excellencies of the productions emanating from a source so richly endowed with heavenly wisdom.

The book of Proverbs furnishes us with a beautiful specimen of Proverbial or Gnostic poetry of the Hebrews; and is unquestionably the most exquisite composition of its kind that has ever been penned. It contains about five hundred short and impressive sayings, the result of the profoundest human sagacity, replete with solemn truths, wholesome counsels, and tender admonitions; addressing themselves with equal aptitude to the king on the throne, and the suppliant beggar; to the advanced in years as well as the young. Who would not gather such “apples of gold with figures of silver.† (Eng. vers. in pictures of silver) Prov. xxv. 2. As brevity gives life to the proverb, the Hebrew language is particularly well adapted to this species of composition, but must necessarily lose much of its pointed-

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\* As early as one hundred years before the Christian era, the apocryphal book called “The Wisdom of Solomon” appeared, which is still extant in the Greek, purporting to be the production of that monarch. Its style, however, is unlike that of Solomon, and it contains expressions and ideas which tend to prove that it originated in the Alexandrian school. Indeed, from the quotations from the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, it would appear that the author, whoever he may have been, had no desire to pass it off as the composition of that monarch. The Book of Wisdom, however, has justly been admired for the lofty and sublime ideas of the perfections of the Deity which it contains, and for the highly moral tendency of its precepts.

† The Hebrew word מַשְׂכֵּי־יָרֵךְ (*māskiyōth*), which I have rendered by *figures*, occurs in the singular, Ezek. viii. 12, “every man in the chambers of his imagery,” which appear from verses 10 and 11 to have been chambers of which the walls were



ness and vigour by translation into any of our modern languages, as their structure cannot admit such brevity of expression. From the following example taken at random, the reader will be able to form some idea of the correctness of what I have stated:

kēlī	lātstsōrēph	vāyyētsē	mīkkāsēph	sīgīm	hāgō
כֶּלִי	לִצְרָף	וַיֵּצֵא	מִכֶּסֶף	סִיגִים	הָגוֹ
a vessel	for the finer	and there shall go forth	from the silver	the dross	take away

chap. xxv. 4.

It will be perceived that there are only six words in the Hebrew, whilst there are no less than seventeen in the English translation. The following verse has likewise seventeen words in the English version, but only seven in the original:

“Take away the wicked *from* before the king,  
And his throne shall be established in righteousness.”

Prov. xxv. 5.

Although almost every nation has its proverbs, yet the people of the east seemed to have had a special fondness for such sententious sayings. With them they appear to have been a favourite mode of instruction, as peculiarly fitted to impress the mind, and imprint the truth more firmly on the memory. The Proverbs of Solomon, however, form a distinct class, altogether unlike those of other nations. The latter, it is true, often inculcate certain rules of conduct or of caution which experience has shown to be useful for some end or purpose. Some of them even convey moral instruction; take for instance the German proverb—

“Unschuld und ein gut Gewissen  
Sind ein sanftes Ruhekissen.” i.e.

“Innocence and a good conscience are a soft pillow.”

Still there are many which have quite a contrary tendency, setting forth principles altogether at variance with true religion. As for example—

“Noth hat kein Gebot.” i.e.

“Necessity has no law.”

The Proverbs of Solomon, on the other hand, furnish nothing but

painted with figures of idols to which the idolatrous Israelites paid adoration. It occurs again, Levit. xxvi. 1. אִבְנֵי מַשְׁכִּית (ēvên māsķīth) where it means a stone with the image of an idol. In Numb. xxxiii. 52., it occurs in the plural, when it no doubt means *images* made of wood or stone, (Eng. vers., pictures.) So in the above passage, it means images of silver, artfully worked in the apples of gold to increase their beauty. Some have rendered “apples of gold in baskets of silver,” but as the word מַשְׁכִּית (māsķīth) nowhere occurs in the sense of *basket*, such an interpretation is altogether inadmissible. By the “apples of gold,” we understand such as may have been used as ornaments of dress, or for adorning vessels.

truly wise and holy precepts, calculated to promote both the moral and religious culture of the people. They constitute a mine of divine wisdom, and like a brilliant luminary diffuse their heavenly light. Well might the learned and pious Jerome in advising one of his friends, in regard to the education of his daughter, recommend to have her instructed in the Proverbs of Solomon for godly life.

The book of Proverbs consists of several independent collections. The first ten chapters form an unbroken discourse, the subject of which is almost entirely the praise of wisdom and the blessings it confers on these who diligently seek after it. From chapter x. to chapter xxii. 16, we have a collection of desultory aphorisms on various topics. At chapter xxii. 17, the style again alters, assuming an admonitory tone, with a closer connection of sentences similar to that of the first ten chapters, and continues so to chapter xxv., when the disconnected proverbs recommence. The thirtieth chapter, according to its title, contains the proverbs of another sage: "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the saying (Engl. ver. "the prophecy") which the men spoke unto Ithiel," &c. The sayings of this sage assume more the form of enigmas, of which the oriental nations were also very fond. In chapter thirty-first we have, "The words of the king Lemuel, the sayings (Engl. ver. the prophecy\*) which his mother taught him," and from them we may learn what constituted the virtues of the women of that country and age. This chapter furnishes us also with an acrostic or alphabetical poem, commencing at the tenth verse, the characteristic form of which is, that it consists of twenty-two lines, according to the number of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the first word of every line commencing with a letter in its order as it stands in the alphabet, so that the first line begins with the letter א (aleph) *a*, the second with ב (beth) *b*, and so on.

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\* The Hebrew word מַשָּׁל (māssā) above rendered 'prophecy' occurs generally in the inscriptions of prophecies, and as many of these are of a threatening nature, the English and some other versions have rendered it by *burden*—as Isaiah xiii. 1. "The burden of Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see." See also chap. xiv. 28, chap. xv. 1. But neither the rendering *burden* nor *prophecy* is suitable in Prov. xxx. 1, and xxxi. 1. The word in question is derived from the verb נָסָא (nāsā) to lift up, sometimes with special reference to any thing lifted up or uttered with the voice, as a song; see 1 Chron. xv. 22, "And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites בָּמַנְסָא (bāmmāssā) in the song; he instructed בָּמַנְסָא (bāmmāssā) in the song, because he was skilful;" so again, verse 27, also a *prophecy, oracle or divine revelation*. And indeed, wherever the word is rendered by *burden* in the inscrip-

As the names Agur and Lemuel do not occur elsewhere in scripture, it is difficult to conjecture who these persons were. The supposition that Lemuel is a name which Solomon had assumed is merely conjecture, there not being the slightest proof to sustain it. On the contrary, we cannot easily conceive why Solomon should have assumed another name just in the last chapter of the book.

The book of Ecclesiastes may be called a sermon in the garb of highly poetic diction. Its text is "Vanity of vanities;\* all is vanity:" chap. i. 2.; a fundamental truth, which indeed pervades the whole sacred writ, but is here compressed into few words. Upon this text the preacher enlarges, setting forth his own convictions regarding the uselessness and utter nothingness of all things appertaining to this life, interspersing his discourse here and there with sentences of wisdom and rules of life, and finally concluding his remarks with the brief but comprehensive exhortation: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter—fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it *be* good, or whether it *be* evil." Chap. xii. 13, 14. As much as to say—from what has been said regarding the vanity of all earthly enjoyments, or things appertaining to this life, the conclusion is, that it is the highest folly for man to set his affections upon them, seeing his life passes away like a shadow; but rather, let him fear God and keep his commandments; by which alone he may secure that happiness in the life to come, which endureth for ever.

The Hebrew name of this book is קהלת (koheleth) i.e. a *preacher*, by which title Solomon is denoted—"The words of the preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem." Chap. i. 1. The name Ecclesiastes in the English version is merely a transcript of the Greek word Ἐκκλησιαστής from the Septuagint version, also signifying a *preacher*. It has been contended by many interpreters that Solomon cannot be the author of this book, inasmuch as words occur

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tions of prophecies, one or other of these words would be more suitable, as the prophecies with which this word is found, in their inscriptions are not always of a threatening nature; some of them rather importing good. At any rate, the sense would be more clearly conveyed and better understood by every class of readers. It signifies also a *saying* or *maxim*, as in the two passages of Proverbs above referred to.

\* Vanity of vanities, i.e. the most excessive vanity. This is one of the modes of forming the superlative degree in the Hebrew language, viz., by placing a noun in construction with one of the same kind in the plural. So "a servant of servants," i.e. a servant of the lowest class. Gen. ix. 25.



in it which tend to prove that it must have been written at a later period than that of Solomon, but no one has, as yet, attempted to show who is to be considered the real author. So far, on this point, we have nothing but conjectures. De Wette dismisses the subject very briefly, merely stating, "By a fiction, Solomon is introduced here as speaking."—*Introd. to the Old Test.* § 283. Professor Kurtz is somewhat more explicit, he says: "The name of the author cannot be ascertained. It is an error to suppose that he professes to be king Solomon himself; it is rather his purpose to introduce the reader, by means of poetic imagery, to an assembly in which the wise Solomon (as a representative of wisdom and the author of the proverbial mode of instruction) expresses his views respecting the problems of this life."—*Manual of Sacred History*, § 110. The supposition of Augusti is somewhat more novel. This writer maintains that Solomon merely appears in the character of *a man deceased*, or a ghost.

The supposition, on the contrary, that Solomon was really the author of it, is at least based upon something more substantial than mere conjecture. In the first place, the title of the book explicitly declares him to be the author, and this positive statement ought not, in my opinion, to be set aside merely because there are a few foreign words introduced into the book. Secondly, the affinities of Ecclesiastes in thought and style with the book of Proverbs are so marked, as to leave hardly any doubt that they are both the production of one author. Thirdly, several passages in the book agree with no other person than that prince, as chap. i. 12., chap. vii. 25, 26, 27, chap. xii. 9, &c. Fourthly, tradition and the common opinion of the ancients declare Solomon to be the author.

Every Hebrew scholar must admit that there occur in the book of Ecclesiastes not only words which are not found in the writings belonging to the golden age of Hebrew literature, but likewise also Chaldaisms. Thus, we find זמן (s'man) chap. iii. 1, *time*, for עת (eth) *time*, גומץ (gumats) *a pit*, for בור (bor) *a pit*, הבל (häväl) *vanity*, for הבל (hevel) *vanity*. Their number has, however, been greatly exaggerated; the mighty mountain, on a closer inspection, after all turns out but a small hill, which no ordinary Hebrew scholar need be afraid to ascend, though he may not have the assistance of the Chaldee and Syriac to aid him. I am

altogether at a loss to see what should have so “greatly puzzled” Dr. Clark. One of the peculiarities which occur very frequently in Ecclesiastes, and which are said to point to a later origin of that book, is the prefix שֶׁ (she), the fragment of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר (ăshēr) *which*. The same peculiarity, however, is found in the books of Judges, Job, and the Canticles.

The Song of Solomon is justly entitled שִׁיר הַשְּׁירִים (shīr hashshīrīm) lit. Song of Songs, i.e., the most exquisite or most excellent song. Its great poetical merit, its depth of thought and richness of sentiment, render this name highly appropriate. In perusing this beautiful literary gem, we feel ourselves transported as it were into a fairy land, with silvery fountains and rippling rivulets, with mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense, with blooming gardens and fruitful orchards, with an azure sky and balmy breeze; where the fleet roe and young hart gambol upon the mountain of spices, and where the woods resound with the carrol of birds and the cooing of the turtle dove.

There exists a diversity of opinion among commentators as to what gave rise to this song, but that which has been advanced by Origen (who regards it as an epithalamium, or marriage song) in the preface to his commentary on this book, is unquestionably the most plausible. This opinion has been adopted by many learned divines, and among those by the learned Bishop Lowth, who remarks, “‘The Song of Songs,’ for so it is called, either on account of the excellence of the subject or of the composition, is an epithalamium or nuptial dialogue, or rather, if we may be allowed to give it a title more agreeable to the genius of the Hebrews, a Song of Loves. Such is the title of Psalm xlv. It is expressive of the utmost fervour as well as delicacy of passion, it is instinct with all the spirit and sweetness of affection. The principal characters are Solomon and his bride, who are represented speaking both in dialogue, and in soliloquy, when accidentally separated. Virgins, also, the companions of the bride, are introduced, who seem to be constantly on the stage, and bear a part in the dialogue. Mention is also made of young men, friends of the bridegroom, but they are mute persons. This is exactly conformable to the manners of the Hebrews, who had always a number of companions to the bridegroom, thirty of whom were present in honour of Samson at his nuptial feast. (Judg. xiv.

11.) In the New Testament, according to the Hebrew idiom, they are called children or sons of the bridechamber, and friends of the bridegroom. There, too, we find mention of the virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom and conduct him home ; which circumstances indicate that this poem is founded on the nuptial rites of the Hebrews, and is expressive of the forms or ceremonial of their marriage." But whilst the whole strain of the poem clearly shows it to be a nuptial song, yet under the guidance of divine inspiration it was so constructed as to form a mystical allegory representing the relation subsisting between the Lord and His church, as His bride. There are several considerations which render an allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon imperative. First, its admission among the canonical books of the Old Testament ; for it can hardly be supposed that a book treating merely of earthly love would have found a place among the inspired writings. Secondly, both the Old and New Testament abound with bridal and nuptial terms referring more or less pointedly to the relation of the Lord to His church. As Isaiah liv. 5 ; Jerem. ii. 2, iii. 1, &c. ; Ezek. xvi. 8-14, and xxiii ; Hosea ii. 19-20 ; Matt. ix. 15 ; John iii. 29 ; 2 Cor. xi. 2 ; Eph. v. 23-27 ; Rev. xix. 7, xxi. 2, xxii. 17. Thirdly, the forty-fifth Psalm, which is one of the Messianic Psalms, bears in its character a striking resemblance to the Song of Solomon, and is called "a song of loves." Fourthly, it has been well observed, that "the native soil of all compositions of the Hebrews, is religion, namely, the theocracy." Fifthly, some of the images employed in the book absolutely require an allegorical interpretation, as for example : "Thou *art* beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as *an army* with banners." Chap. iv. 4. The beauty (i.e. excellence) of the church is compared to Tirzah and Jerusalem. The former was an ancient Canaanitish city, beautifully situated, which Jeroboam made the capital of his kingdom, and it remained so until Omri built Samaria ; the latter is the world-renowned capital of the Jews. The final triumph of the church is beautifully compared to a victorious army with its waving banners. A literal application of this passage to the bride of Solomon must at best be awkward and far-fetched. Both the ancient and modern Jews have adopted an allegorical interpretation of this book, although they differ in their applications. According to the Chaldee paraphrast the poem contains a figurative description of the merciful and gracious dealings of God towards His people. Aben Ezra



maintains that the Song of Solomon represents the history of the Jews from Abraham to the Messiah. Other Jewish writers consider Wisdom, with which Solomon was acquainted from his youth, and with whose beauty he was captivated, as personified in or by the bride. All sound Christian commentators, from the time of Origen to the present day, have regarded the book as containing a divine allegory, and understand it to be descriptive of the union of Christ and His church.

We may also observe here that it has been a common practice among the Oriental nations from a very early period to express religious sentiments allegorically under the garb of amatory poems, of which the *Gita-govinda*\* affords an example. Even at the present day the Egyptian Arabs sing religious love-songs at their festivals, in which Mahommed is the beloved subject, and which are intended to have only a spiritual sense. Mr. Lane has translated several passages to show the great similarity of these songs to that of Solomon. He further states, "Finding that songs of this description are extremely numerous, and almost the only poems sung at Zikrs; † that they are composed for this purpose, and intended only to have a spiritual sense, (though certainly not understood in such a sense by the generality of the vulgar); I cannot entertain any doubt as to the design of Solomon's Song."—*Lane's Modern Egyptians*, vol. II., pages 196 and 197.

An ancient father of the church has very pertinently remarked, "that Isaiah deserved the name of an evangelist rather than a prophet." Indeed this "Prince of Prophets," as some divines denominate him, has with such precision and clearness described events that were to come to pass in the most distant times, that his predictions resemble more histories of by-gone occurrences than

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\* *Gita-govinda* (which is one of the names of Chrishna) is a beautiful and popular pastoral drama by the celebrated Hindoo poet Jojadéva, who flourished about A.D. 120. The subject of this poem is "the loves of Chrishna and Radha," or the reciprocal attraction between the Divine goodness and the human soul. A very accurate edition of the original text, with notes, and a Latin translation, edited by Lassen, was published at Bonn, in 1836. An English translation was published by Sir William Jones, in the third volume of the *Asiatic Researches*.

† The performance of the Zikrs is the repetition of Allah, i.e. *the name of God*, or the profession of his unity, &c. Those who perform it bow the head and body each time they pronounce the name, alternately to the right and the left. It is sometimes performed by a great many durweeshes, who then form a ring and move round in a circle, exclaiming over and over again, Allah, bowing the head and body each time. During the performance of Zikrs they sing also religious love-songs. The Zikrs is frequently performed during private festivities.

prophecies that were only to transpire after a lapse of centuries. The style, too, of this divine writer has been universally admired as the most perfect model of sublimity. The uniform grandeur, the lofty diction, the richness of figure, the depth of thought, which pervade the whole book of Isaiah, require that it should not only be carefully read, but diligently studied, in order to be properly understood, and its beauties fully appreciated. Thus, for instance, when we read, chap. vii. 18, 19: “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall whistle to (Eng. ver. “hiss for”) the fly which *is* in the uppermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all the thorns, and upon all the pastures.” (Eng. ver. “bushes.”) It must not be understood that the land was to be afflicted by flies and bees, which for that purpose were called from Egypt and Assyria, for we should in vain look in the Jewish history for the fulfilment of this prophecy—no such occurrence being recorded therein. No—the Prophet, by a bold but appropriate figure, compares here the Egyptian armies that were to invade Judea to the flies, which the marshy grounds of Egypt produce in abundance; and the Assyrian armies to bees, which are said to abound in that country. The metaphor, “he will whistle,” is taken from the practice of those who kept bees, and who were accustomed to draw them out of their hives into the fields, and lead them back again by a whistle. Virgil states, that bells and timbrels were also used for that purpose. The expression further indicates the great control which Jehovah exercises over the enemies of Judea. It requires but a whistle, and behold swiftly they come to execute his judgment. Again, when it is said, chap. xiii. 19, 20, “Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.” It must not be supposed that all this was actually to take place when Babylon, against which this oracle is directed, was to be destroyed, for assuredly we should again in vain look in history for a literal accomplishment. This is merely figurative language, which the Hebrew poets employ in depicting the overthrow and destruction of kingdoms, or any great political

revolution. In like manner they depict, by a contrary figure, the restoration or prosperity of kingdoms, states, and princes. In those cases, the sun, moon, and stars are represented as shining with increased splendour, and never setting; the moon becomes like the meridian sun, and the sun's light is augmented sevenfold. See ch. xxx. 26.

When we cast a glance at the pictures which the book of Isaiah contains, we are lost in astonishment and admiration at the diversity of subjects which they present, as well as their life-like and natural delineations. They form one grand panorama, the scenes of which the mind never becomes weary of contemplating. But it was neither the eloquence nor the power of delineation with which Isaiah was so highly gifted, that procured for him the epithet of "Prince of Prophets," but rather the fact, that his prophetic eye scanned the vista of futurity with greater precision than any other of the inspired writers. When he foretells, chap. vii. 8, the entire depopulation of the kingdom of Israel, so that it should cease to be a distinct people, he tells the precise time when that event should take place. This prophecy had its literal fulfilment in Esarhaddon carrying away the remainder of the ten tribes that had been left by Tiglath Pileser and Shalmaneser. In describing, chap. x. 28-32, the march of Senacherib's army against Jerusalem, although by an unusual route and attended with great difficulty, he mentions with marked precision, the very places through which they should pass. It is probable that Senacherib chose this very route, although round about and by no means easy for the march of an army, in the hope of surprising the city.

But in none of the prophecies has Isaiah been so fully explicit, as in those which refer to that happy and glorious event, the coming of the Messiah. For this he may well be called the proto-Evangelist, as if we combine the various prophecies contained in the book relating to the Messiah, we obtain a complete gospel.

According to an ancient tradition, Isaiah suffered martyrdom in the reign of king Manasseh, who caused him to be sawn in two. This tradition has been retained by most of the fathers of the church, and the Church of Rome has set apart the sixth of July in her calendar in commemoration of it. The tradition is somewhat confirmed by 2 Kings xxi. 16, where it is said, "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another;" and by Josephus, who states, that "he barbarously



slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews, nor would he spare the prophets." (Ant. b. x., ch. iii. par. 1.) It is not unlikely that St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews also alludes to this when he says: "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword."—Chap. xi. 37.

The writings of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets, are all highly poetical; but having already trespassed beyond the limits which had been assigned to this essay, we must, though very reluctantly, refrain from noticing each book separately, and proceed to offer a few remarks on the characteristics of Hebrew poetry.

The learned have expended not a little labour and ingenuity in endeavoring to solve the problem, as to what constitutes Hebrew poetry. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* b. ii., chap. iii. p. 4.; b. iv. chap. viii. p. 44.; b. vii. chap. xii. p. 3.) there are to be found in some of the poetical writings of the Old Testament, both hexameter and tetrameter verses. Philo likewise asserts that Moses was acquainted with metre. These positive statements, coming from such ancient sources, induced Gomarus, Grave and many others, to institute a search for those characteristic attributes of the Hebrew muse. But all their endeavours to discover either metre or rhyme proved unsuccessful; and well it might, for they were in fact seeking for a thing which never existed. "The ground of difference," as a writer has well remarked, "observable between the poetry of other nations and that of the Hebrews, lies in the fact that the prosodies of the former prescribe certain strict and undeviating limits, within which the poet is compelled to move in the expression of his feelings; such as the length of the verses, the arrangement of the syllables composing them according to quantity, the place of the cesura, &c., to which moderns have added the regular recurrence of like endings, or rhymes. The sacred Hebrew muse, on the contrary, maintaining her primitive simplicity, lays down no arbitrary laws of versification with which to fetter the genius of the poet; she requires of her votary neither more nor less than that he should find himself in that state of excited and exalted feeling which is necessary to the production of all genuine poetry, and possess the power of delineating his emotions with truth and vigour."

It is true that we meet with some isolated passages which appear to rhyme, as for instance, Psalm lxxii. 10.

yashivū	minchah	v'iyim	tharshish	malchē
וְשִׁיבוּ	מִנְחָה	וְאִיִּם	תְּרִשִׁישׁ	מַלְכֵי
yakrivū	eshkar	us'vā	sh'vā	malehē
יִקְרִיבוּ	אֶשְׁכָּר	וּסְבָא	שְׁבָא	מַלְכֵי

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents.

The Kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

See also Isaiah i. 25, 29; Prov. vi. 1, 2; Job vi. 9; and so in a few other places.

These apparent rhymes are however only produced accidentally, arising as will be seen from the pronominal suffixes of the last words. Even in the witty reply of Samson, in which rhyme was probably intended, the similarity of sound in the last syllable of each line is the necessary result of the pronominal suffixes.

בְּעִגְלָתִי	חֲרָשְׁתָּם	לִי־לֵא
חִידָתִי	מִצְאָתָם	לֵא

Lūlē chārāshtēm b'ēglāthī

Lō m'tsāthēm chīdāthī

If ye had not ploughed with my heifer,  
Ye had not found out my riddle.

Judges, xiv. 18.

But although it is certain that neither metre nor rhyme are to be found in Hebrew poetry, the reader cannot be at a loss to distinguish readily the poetical from the prose writings. There is a certain style prevading the former, which unmistakeably shows them to be compositions altogether of a grander and more elevated order. This style, which forms the chief characteristic of the sacred poetry of the Old Testament, is *parallelism*, and has its existence, not as an embellishment like the artificial decorations of metre and rhyme in the poetry of other nations, but as the natural and inseparable accompaniment of genuine poetry. Hence we find this style already employed in the very infancy of the human race, as may be seen from the address of Lamech to his wives.

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,  
Wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech !  
If I have slain a man to my wounding,  
And a young man to my hurt :  
If Cain shall be avenged seven times  
Then Lamech seventy times seven.

Gen. iv. 23, 24.

Here it will be perceived that in the second, fourth and sixth lines the same sentiments are expressed as in the first, third and fifth, the language only being varied.

The various kinds of parallelism have generally been reduced into three classes, namely, *synonymous*, *antithetic* and *synthetic*; but these are hardly sufficient to embrace the infinite variety of construction which exists in Hebrew poetry. Still as this arrangement is the one generally adopted, and as it will suffice to give the reader an idea of the principal forms which are met with, we shall retain it here.

I. *Synonymous Parallelism*. To this class belong the following varieties, namely—

Those in which the idea of the first clause is repeated in the second, the language being merely slightly altered, as

How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?

And how shall I defy, whom Jehovah hath not defied?

Balaam's prophecy, Numb. xxiii. 8.

Jehovah, what is man, that thou knowest (i.e. carest for) him?

And the son of man, that thou regardest him?

Psalms cxliv. 3.

For affliction cometh not out of the dust,

And trouble springeth not out of the ground.

Job v. 6.

Happy is the man *that* findeth wisdom,

And the man *that* getteth understanding.

Prov. iii. 13.

For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye\* have desired,

And they shall blush for the gardens which ye have chosen.

Isaiah i. 29.

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood,

And establisheth a city by iniquity.

Hab. ii. 12.

Sometimes the idea expressed in the first clause, is repeated twice, thus forming a stanza of three lines, as

Let them be ashamed and confounded together who seek my life to destroy it.

Let them be driven back and made ashamed who wish me evil.

Let them be desolate in reward of their shame who say to me, Aha, Aha!

Psalms xl. 15, 16.

More frequently, however, the two first lines only are synonymous, whilst in the third the idea is more fully developed, as

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\* In the change of person in the above passage, namely, from the *third* to the *second* person, we have an example of the bold figure of speech called by grammarians *enallage personarum*, which the prophets often employ to give additional force to their declarations and exhortations. Sometimes there is also a change from the *third* to the first person, as "And he shall bless thy bread and thy water; and I will take sickness from among thee"—Exod. xxiii. 25. So we find also the change from the *first* person to the *third*, as "And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state he shall pull thee down." Isaiah xxii. 19.



Thy righteousness is like great mountains ; (lit. mountains of God.)  
 Thy judgments like a great deep :  
 Man and beast thou helpest, Jehovah.

Psalm xxxvi. 7. (Eng. ver. verse 6.)

And he shall eat on the right, and be hungry ;  
 And devour on the left, and not be satisfied ;  
 Every one shall devour the flesh of his arm.

Isaiah ix. 19 (Eng. ver. verse 20.)

Sometimes we meet with stanzas of four lines having a double parallelism, so that the second clause corresponds to the first, and the fourth to the third, as

God is not man, that he should lie ;  
 Or the son of man, that he should repent :  
 Hath he said, and shall he not do it ?  
 Or hath he spoken, and shall he not perform it ?

Balaam's prophecy, Numb. xxiii. 19.

Tell it not in Gath,  
 Publish it not in the streets of Askelon ;  
 Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,  
 Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

David's elegy, 2 Sam. i. 20.

So we meet likewise with stanzas of six lines, every alternate line forming a parallelism with the one preceeding, as

Therefore as the flame of fire consumeth the stubble,  
 And as the ignited grass falls away,  
 So their root shall be as rottenness,  
 And their blossom shall go up as fine dust :  
 For they have rejected the law of Jehovah of Hosts,  
 And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah v. 24.

II. *Antithetic Parallelism*. To this class belong those parallelisms in which the second clause contains an opposition of terms and sentiments, to those expressed in the first. This class of parallelism is particularly adapted to all kinds of sententious sayings, hence it occurs very frequently in the Proverbs of Solomon, where it has been employed with marked effect. The degrees of antithesis are various. Sometimes there is an exact contraposition of word to word, as

Faithful | are the wounds | of a friend,  
 But deceitful | are the kisses | of an enemy.\*

Prov. xxvii. 6.

They | bow down | and fall,  
 But we | rise up | and stand.

Psalm xx. 9 (Eng. ver. verse 8.)

In like manner we meet with four lines, in which the third stands in antithesis with the first, and the fourth with the second, as

\* "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," i.e. sincere are the rebukes of a friend. The Hebrew word נֶעְתָּרוֹת (nataroth) has been variously rendered. Literally it signifies *abundant*, but is evidently employed in the above passage in an accessory signification, *deceitful*, as the parallelism clearly indicates. So Ewald "falsch," i.e. *false*.

If ye shall be willing and obey,  
The good of the land ye shall eat;  
But if ye shall refuse and rebel,  
By the sword ye shall be consumed.

Isaiah i. 19, 20.

More frequently, however, the contraposition of word to word does not extend throughout the sentence, as

Righteousness exalteth a nation:  
But sin is a reproach to a people.

Prov. xiv. 34.

Here the two last terms, "nation," "people," are not antithetic but synonymous terms.

Sometimes we meet with stanzas of four lines, of which the two last stand in antithesis with the two preceding, as

The ox knoweth his owner,  
And the ass the crib of his master;  
Israel doth not know me,  
My people doth not consider.

Isaiah i. 3.

III. *Synthetic Parallelism.* To this class belong those in which the parallelism merely consists in the similar form of construction, and where the writer, after having expressed an idea, keeps it constantly in view, whilst he dilates upon it. As Job iii. 3-9.

Let the day perish wherein I was born,  
And the night *in which* it was said, a man-child is conceived.  
Let that day be darkness:  
Let God not regard it from above;  
Nor let light shine upon it, &c.

Here the idea expressed in the two first lines is constantly kept in view in the subsequent verses. Another beautiful example of this kind of parallelism we have in Ecclesiastes xii. 1-7.

1. But remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,  
While as yet the evil days come not, and the years draw nigh,  
When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.
2. While the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be not darkened,  
And the clouds return after the rain.
3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,  
And the strong men bow themselves down,  
And the grinders cease because they have become few,  
And those that look out of the windows be darkened.
4. And the door shall be shut in the street,  
When the sound of the mill is low;  
And he shall rise up at the voice of the sparrow,  
And all the daughters of song shall be brought low.
5. Also for a height they are afraid, and terrors are in the way;  
And the almond is rejected, and the locust becomes a burden, and the  
[caper-berry fails.  
For man goes to his long home,  
And the mourners go about the street.

6. Before the silver cord be loosed,  
And the golden bowl be broken,  
And the bucket be broken at the fountain,  
And broken the wheel at the cistern.
7. And the dust return to the earth as it was:  
And the spirit to God who gave it.\*

\* For an explanation of the first five lines, see Introduction, page 22. "The keepers of the house," are the two hands, which are properly so called, as they are employed to ward off any danger that may threaten the body. "And the strong men," are the legs and feet which carry the body. The legs through the relaxing of the muscles in old age bend at the knees, the weight of the body being too heavy for them. The Hebrew term **אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִל** (anshe chayil) denotes *men of strength, men of valour*, hence also *men of war*, i.e. warriors. Now as those who possessed great strength in the legs and feet were considered among the best warriors or strong men, the feet and legs themselves are here metaphorically called "strong men." "The grinders cease," i.e. the teeth which in old age become few. "Those that look out of the windows are darkened," are plainly the eyes. The eye-lashes are here compared to windows, or rather to the lattice-work of the windows, which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word **אֲרָבוֹת** (arubboth). Lattice-work being employed in the east instead of glass, the literal rendering would be *those that look out through the lattice windows*." This figure obtains additional beauty and becomes more strikingly appropriate when we consider that in Hebrew, the *apple of the eye* is called **בַּת עֵיִן** (bath ayin) i.e. *daughter of the eye*, or **אִישׁוֹן עֵיִן** i.e. *little man of the eye*. "And the door shall be shut in the street." The door evidently means the lips, which form the door of the mouth. For a similar expression, see Psalm cxli. 3; Michah vii. 5.—"Keep the doors of thy mouth." The street is mentioned merely to show that the outside door is meant. "Are shut," when the teeth are gone the lips become compressed. "When the sound of the mill is low." As the teeth are in the preceding verse, called "grinders," it follows that the mill itself must be the mouth. "And he shall rise up at the voice of the sparrow." This expresses the restlessness of old age. In the east, it is a common practice both with the young and old to rise with the dawn. Some render the passage "it rises to the voice of the sparrow," i.e. it attains to the voice of the sparrow, which is very feeble, referring it to the feeble voice of the aged. But I think that although the voice generally becomes feeble in old age, still it would be somewhat excessive to compare it to the chirping of a bird. "Daughters of the song," is merely a poetic expression for *song*. So "daughters of Jerusalem," i.e. inhabitants of Jerusalem—"Daughters of Tyre," i.e. inhabitants of Tyre. And so in the Talmud **בַּת קוֹל** (bāth kol) lit. the daughter of the voice, i.e. simply *the voice*. The loss of the voice is the natural result from the loss of the teeth and the falling in of the lips. "For a height they are afraid," i.e. they have an aversion to ascend high places, being too fatiguing. "And terrors are in the way," i.e. they are in constant dread of falling, their eyesight having grown dim, and their legs become enfeebled. Hence the cautious and slow gait of old people. "And the almond is rejected." The rejection of this delicate and once favourite fruit arises from the loss of the teeth, the old being no longer able to masticate it. The English version has rendered this passage "and the almond tree shall flourish," as likewise the Septuagint, Syriac and Vulgate versions, which would refer to the white hairs, here compared to the profuse white flowers of the almond tree. This figure is rendered still more appropriate by the fact, that this tree is the first which wakes from its winter slumber, hence called in Hebrew **שֶׁקֶד** (shaked) i.e. *the waker*, and from its blossoming in Palestine in January, so that the hoary hairs of the winter of life form a beautiful similitude with the winter blossoms of the almond tree. Gesenius's objection to this comparison, "that the flower of the almond tree is not white, but rose-coloured," is altogether trifling, since white by far predominates in the blossom,



Another characteristic of Hebrew poetry, is *gradation*, i.e. where every succeeding expression is heightened in force, as

He sitting in the heavens shall laugh :  
The Lord shall deride them.  
Then he shall speak unto them in his anger,  
And in his wrath he shall confound them.

Here it will be observed, at first God is represented as merely *smiling* at the designs of the kings of the earth, then as deriding them, then as *speaking* to them, or as it would be more literally rendered as *earnestly speaking* to them, and lastly as *confounding* them. Psalm ii. 4, 5.

Frequently too we find two definite numbers employed, the second being greater than the first in order to express an indefinite number, as

In six troubles he shall deliver thee :  
And in seven no evil shall touch thee.

Job v. 19.

Give a portion to seven, and also to eight ;  
For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

Eccles. xi. 2.

and when viewed from a little distance, the rose-coloured tinge is scarcely visible. My reason for adopting a different rendering is entirely founded upon philological grounds. The Hebrew word שָׁקַד (shaked) denotes both an almond tree, see Jer. i. 11, and an almond nut, see Gen. xliii. 11, so that either rendering would do so far as this word is concerned. Not so, however, with the verb יָנַאץ (yanets) which is the future *hiphil* of the verb נָאָץ (nāʾats) which signifies to *despise*, to *deride*, to *reject*, but never to *blossom*, in which case either the verb פָּרַח (pārāch), see Hab. iii. 17; Gen. xl. 10, or the verb נָוץ (nūts), see Cant. vi. 11., would have been employed. Besides, the rendering which I have given agrees better with the context. "And the locust becomes a burden." The species of locust denoted by חָגָב (chagav) is according to Lev. xi. 22, permitted to be eaten. It is said that it is even to this day brought into the market for sale, and that the hard shelled ones resemble in taste the crawfish, and are regarded as a great delicacy. Diodorus Siculus speaks of a people of Ethiopia who were so fond of them that they were called *Acridophagi*, i.e. *eaters of locusts*. The sense of the text then is, that the most delicious viands become a burden to the old man, whose appetite fails, or who cannot digest them. "And the caper-berry fails." The caper-berry is said to be a provocative of appetite and lust, and was used as a stimulant. But even this fails to produce its usual results. At verse 6, commences another exhortation, and we must therefore supply from the first verse—Remember thy creator—Before the silver cord be loosed. "The silver cord," i.e. (the nervous system) made of silver threads, means the chain by which "the golden bowl," i.e. the lamp of life is suspended, which is here represented to fall to the ground, when the cord by which it hangs is loosed and is broken in pieces. "And the bucket be broken at the fountain, and broken the wheel at the cistern." The same idea is here repeated under a different figure. When such mishaps befall the water apparatus, no more water is to be had; so likewise when the apparatus for breathing is broken, the breath must necessarily cease.

There is still another gradation which we frequently meet with, and which consists in a thought or idea that has just been expressed being again taken up and more fully carried out, as

CURSE YE Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,  
CURSE YE bitterly its inhabitants;  
FOR THEY CAME NOT TO THE HELP OF THE LORD,  
TO THE HELP OF THE LORD against the mighty.

Song of Deborah, Judg. v. 23.

GOD OF VENGEANCE, Jehovah;  
GOD OF VENGEANCE, shine forth!

Psalms xciv. 1.

We have yet to notice another characteristic of Hebrew poetry, and that is, *the use of certain words which are only found in the poetical writings, and for which others are employed in the prose compositions.* As for example, מִלָּה (mīllāh) *a word* in poetry; דָּבָר (dāvār) *a word* in prose; אָנוּשׁ (ēnōsh) *a man*, poetry; אָדָם (ādām) *a man*, prose. אָתָּה (āthāh) *to come*, poetry; בּוֹא (bō) *to come*, prose, &c.

Also the use of certain epithets for substantives, as לְבָנָה (l'vānāh) i.e. *the white*, for the moon, Cant. vi. 10, Isaiah xxiv. 23; in prose always יָרֵחַ (yārēāch) i.e. *the moon*. חֲמָה (chāmmāh) i.e. *heat*, for the sun, Job xxx. 28; Isaiah xxx. 26; in prose שֶׁמֶשׁ (shēmēsh) i.e. *the sun*, &c.

So likewise the use of the construct plural form with prepositions, as עָלַי (ālē) for עַל (āl) *upon*. אֵלַי (ēlē) for אֶל (ēl) *unto*. עַד (ādē) for עַד (ād) *until*.

Also the use of the poetical pronominal suffix מוֹ (mō) for הֶם (hēm) *them*. And the Chaldee plural ending יָן (īn) instead of יִם (īm).

Now all these characteristics of Hebrew poetry exist in the books of the Prophets, as well as in the book of Job, the Psalms and the Proverbs, which are universally admitted to be poetical, and it follows therefore that the former as well as the latter must be written in poetry. It must be from a total disregard of these characteristics, or being misled by the somewhat more sententious and regular form of construction of the lines that exist in Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Canticles, Lamentations, and in some of the isolated poems of the Old Testament, that so many entertain the erroneous idea that the prophetic books were written in prose.

Before concluding this essay, we shall only add a few remarks upon the acrostic or alphabetical poems to which we have already alluded. Of these poems there are twelve extant in the Old Testament, viz., Psalms xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxi., cxii., cxix., cxlv; Prov. xxxi., verses 10–31; Lament. i., ii., iii., iv., and their form is: they consist of twenty-two lines or stanzas, according to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and every line or stanza beginning with each letter in regular order as it stands in the alphabet. Thus the first line begins with א *a*, the second with ב *b*, &c. Of these, some, however, are more perfect than others, as Psalms cxi. and cxii., and Lament. iii. The two first consist of ten stanzas each, every stanza having two lines, except the two last, which contain three lines each, thus making up the number twenty-two. As in the Hebrew Bible, the stanzas are not divided into lines; we shall subjoin here the two first verses of Psalm cxi. in regular lines, which will serve as a guide.

אוֹדָה יְהוָה בְּכָל־לֵב *a*  
בְּסוֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעֵדָה : *b*  
גְּדֹלִים מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה *g*\*  
דְּרוֹשִׁים לְכָל־חַפְצֵיהֶם : *d*

It will be seen that the accent (^) (athnach) marks the end of the first line of each stanza, and (,) (silluk) the close of the second. In the last two verses which each contain three lines, the (·) (r'via) marks the end of the first. The third of the perfect alphabetical poems, viz., Lament. iii. consists of twenty-two stanzas of three lines each, as

*1st Stanza.*

אֲנִי הַגִּבֹּר רָאָה עֲנִי בְּשֶׁבֶט עֲבָרְתִּי : *a*  
אוֹתִי נָהַב וַיִּלְכֶּד חֲשֵׁךְ וְלֹא־אֹר : *a*  
אֵךְ בִּי וְשָׁב וַיַּחֲפֹץ יָדוֹ כְּלִי־חַיִּים : *a*

*2nd Stanza.*

בָּלָה בְּשָׁרִי וְעוֹרִי שֶׁבֶר עֲצָמוֹתַי *b*  
בָּנָה עָלַי וַיִּקָּם רֹאשׁ וַתִּלְאָה : *b*  
בְּמַחֲשָׁבִים הוֹשִׁיבֵנִי כִּמְתִּי עוֹלָם : *b*

\* The third letter in the Hebrew alphabet is *g* and not *c* as in the English.



In these perfectly alphabetical poems the lines in each poem are strikingly equal to one another in length, and scarcely less so in the number of words.

The other nine poems are less perfect in their structure. In them the stanzas only are marked with initial letters. Psalm cxix. is divided into twenty-two divisions each containing eight stanzas of two lines, and all the stanzas of each division are marked by the same initial, so that the eight stanzas of the first division begin with א (aleph) *a*, and those of the second with ב (beth) *b*, &c. Psalm xxv., xxxiv. (beginning at the second verse), and cxlv., Prov. xxxi. (beginning at the tenth verse), and Lament. iv. consist of stanzas of two lines each; Lamentations i. and ii. of stanzas of three lines, and Psalm xxxvii. of stanzas of four lines. There exist, however, irregularities in the latter eight poems, which may be imputed to the carelessness of the transcribers, or to the fact of not being able to find a word beginning with the letter required. Hence we find that sometimes a letter was missed or repeated. Thus, for example, in Psalm xxv. there is no stanza beginning with ב (beth) *b*, unless we regard the word אֱלֹהַי (ʾēlohāi) i.e. *O my God*, as originally belonging to the first verse. The next word בְּחָה (b'chā) would then afford the letter required. Or we may suppose, with Rosenmüller and others, that the word אֱלֹהַי (ʾēlohāi), like the *interjections* of the Greek tragic writers, was not reckoned with the verse. In this as well as in Psalm xxxiv., there is also no stanza commencing with the letter ו (vav). And in Psalm xxv. there is likewise no stanza beginning with ק (kōph), but two stanzas commence with ר (resh). Again in Psalm xxxvii. there is no stanza beginning with the letter ע (ayin), and the letter צ (tsade) stands before the letter פ (pē). It is difficult to determine the design of this kind of composition. Lowth thinks "that it was intended for the assistance of the memory; and was chiefly employed in subjects of common use, as maxims of morality, and forms of devotion," and in this supposition he probably may be correct.

